

# **Environmental Assessment/ Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation**

**for Proposed Improvements to I-196, I-96 and M-37/M-44  
in the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Township,  
Kent County, Michigan**



## **Public Hearing**

**Tuesday, November 29, 2005**

**4:00 PM to 8:00 PM**

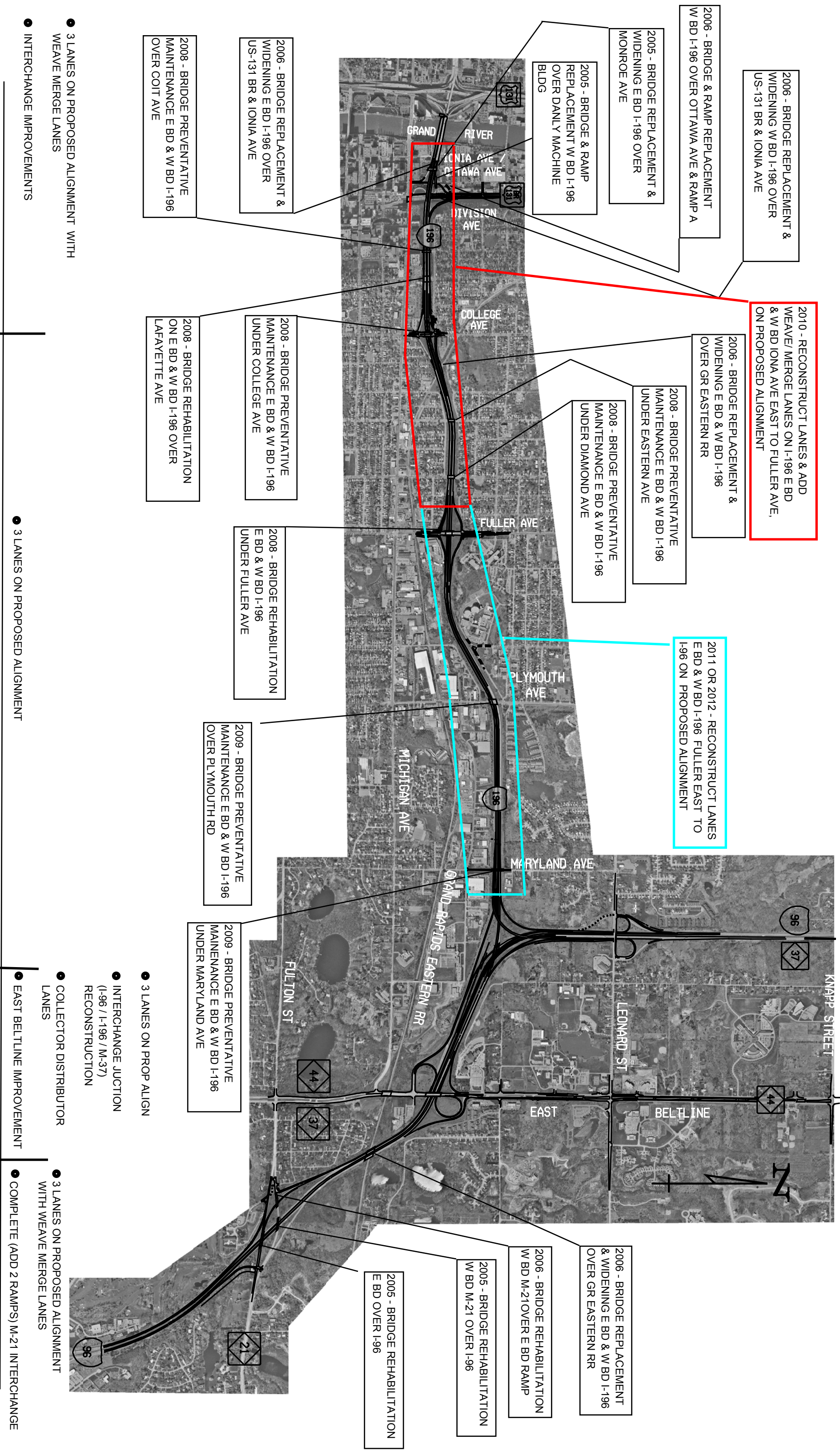
**Grand Rapids Township Hall**

**1836 East Beltline, N.E., Grand Rapids**

**Grand Rapids, Michigan**







## **INTRODUCTION**

This brochure provides information on the public hearing and summarizes information on the Environmental Assessment (EA) and Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for I-196 from US-131 to the I-196/I-96 junction; I-96 from Leonard Street to Cascade Road; and M-37/M-44 (East Beltline) from M-21 (Fulton Street) to Knapp Street in the city of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Township, Kent County, Michigan.. The purpose of this public hearing is to solicit comments on the EA. The EA describes and analyzes the alternatives considered and provides information on the Preferred Alternative that was identified. MDOT will consider necessary modifications to the Preferred Alternative based on the comments from the public and agencies.

## **STUDY BACKGROUND**

In the late 1990s MDOT Grand Region began to plan for major rehabilitation and reconstruction projects along the corridors of this project based on facility age and condition issues. Concurrently, an on-going evaluation and assessment of traffic flow, congestion and safety issues along the freeways in the Grand Rapids area was undertaken to begin developing long-term plans for the system.

After replacing the US-131 S-Curve structure in downtown Grand Rapids in 2000, MDOT began to assess needs and develop freeway modernization strategies for the metro area. In June 2003, MDOT completed the *Conceptual Long Range Master Plan for I-196 and I-96* report that sought to analyze the existing conditions of the structures, pavement and travel conditions and make recommendations that would meet today's needs as well as provide for future growth that was already occurring along the corridor. The report was developed with input from local communities and agencies including the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). GVMC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Grand Rapids area.

The report identified various geometric and operational issues, and found that additional capacity was needed to meet the current and

future travel needs of the area. Additionally, the report identified the need to address deteriorating roadway segments and bridges, as indicated in the Purpose and Need section of the EA. The plan also recognized the advantages of coordinating capacity and geometric improvements with on-going road and bridge rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

This plan was presented to, and discussed with, the MPO staff and committees. Based on these findings, the decision was made to begin the EA process in 2004.

## **PURPOSE OF PROJECT**

The purpose of this project is to enhance mobility to the area by increasing capacity, improving access, and enhancing traffic safety, as well as extending the service life of the highway infrastructure. This will be accomplished by upgrading this corridor to conform to current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) design criteria for roadways and bridges. The improvements will help maintain the efficiency of an important link in the Michigan Interstate System and one that is vital to the economy of the Grand Rapids area. Specific objectives include:

- Improve freeway access within the Grand Rapids metro area, and in downtown Grand Rapids, including the developing Life Sciences Corridor, entertainment centers, colleges and universities.
- Replace and rehabilitate deteriorating pavement and bridges.
- Relieve congestion, improve traffic flow, and enhance safety on the I-196/I-96 freeway corridor, trunkline interchanges (M-21/M-44/M-37), the East Beltline, and the connecting surface streets.
- Improve freeway system linkages, and surface street and highway connections.
- Update and modernize the freeway system through modifications which would address current AASHTO design criteria and guidelines for traffic weave lengths, shoulder widths, road and bridge geometrics, and interchange enhancements.



- Enhance mobility within the study area, while minimizing negative cultural, environmental, economic, social and adjacent property impacts.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The segments of I-196 and I-96 in the project area were constructed in the 1960s. The M-37/M-44 (East Beltline) segment was reconstructed and widened in the 1970s and 1980s and connects directly to I-96. The service life for many of these facilities has been exceeded and improvements are needed. While appropriate design techniques were used when they were built, the freeways are no longer adequate to meet today's transportation needs. In addition, residential and commercial growth in the project area has caused increased traffic demands that now require additional highway capacity to improve traffic flow and safety for the motorists.

## **PROPOSED ACTIONS**

This EA describes various long-term capacity improvements and geometric modifications proposed by MDOT under the Preferred Alternative. These proposed improvements are being developed to allow coordination with planned pavement and bridge reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in future MDOT Five-Year Programs, to minimize traffic disruption, user cost and inconvenience. MDOT is proposing the following actions:

- Construct weave/merge lanes on I-196 between the Ottawa/Ionia Avenues and College Avenue interchanges and between the College Avenue and Fuller Avenue interchanges.
- Construct additional travel lanes on I-196 between the Grand River (US-131) and the I-96 junction, and on I-96 between Leonard Street and Cascade Road.
- Separation of ramp and through traffic by constructing freeway collector/distributor routes, and/or auxiliary lanes on I-96 from Leonard Street through the I-196 junction, M-37/M-44 (East Beltline), M-21 (Fulton Street), and Cascade Road interchange area.
- Construct additional ramps to complete

the I-96/M-21 and I-196/I-96 interchanges.

- Construct additional travel lanes and intersection improvements (turning lane enhancements, signal modifications, etc.) on the East Beltline (M-37/M-44) between M-21 (Fulton Street) and Knapp Street.
- Joint city of Grand Rapids and MDOT modifications to the I-196 at College, Fuller, and Ionia/Ottawa Avenue interchanges, including a new off ramp to northbound Division Avenue from westbound I-196 at Ottawa Avenue, and a proposed boulevard on Division (US-131BR) and Ionia Avenues, north of I-196.

MDOT also is proposing rehabilitation, replacement, widening and/or preventive maintenance on 29 structures along the I-196 and I-96 corridor, as well as rehabilitating and reconstructing the roadway segments in the project area. These structures and roadway segments will be designed to accommodate future freeway mainline widening, as indicated in the EA, and will be designed to meet current national design criteria. Several bridge improvement projects are planned for 2006.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSESSED**

The majority of this project will be constructed within MDOT's existing right-of-way (ROW), therefore, the proposed project will have minimal social, economic, or environmental impacts. As with all proposed projects, MDOT conducted a review (visual inspections, literature searches, database queries, etc.) of potential impacts. Based on these reviews, it was determined that there were no potential adverse impacts to visual resources. The impacts that had a reasonable possibility for individual or cumulative significant impacts have been analyzed. The results of this analysis and potential measures to minimize short-term impacts during construction are discussed in the EA.

A no-build alternative, including only routine maintenance, repair, and preservation of the existing system, also was considered.

## **TRAIL IMPACTS STUDIED**

This study contains a Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for the proposed improvements because of the impact to a non-motorized trail. Section 4(f) of the federal Department of Transportation Act requires that an evaluation be prepared when the proposed action may have an adverse effect on a property eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may impact publicly owned land from a park, recreation area, or wildlife/waterfowl refuge of national, state or local significance.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Throughout the course of the study, public participation and agency coordination has taken place. Input received from the public and agencies has been carefully considered and integrated into the study process.

## **PUBLIC HEARING FORMAT**

The November 29, 2005, public hearing for this project will be an open forum meeting. No formal presentation will be made. This format will allow the public to gather information on a one-on-one basis with MDOT staff, and allow citizens to express their concerns, and provide detailed input regarding specific project components.

Citizens can fill out a comment form and deposit it into the comment box. Comments and letters can also be mailed, faxed or emailed. Contact details are located at the end of this handout.

Court reporters are available to record verbal statements. Participants interested in making a statement or comment about the proposed project may do so at any time during the hearing. All comments received by the deadline will appear in the official transcript of this public hearing.

**Please note that comments must be postmarked by December 12, 2005, to be part of the official public hearing transcript.**

## **DOCUMENT AVAILABLE**

The EA will be available for public review at the following locations until at least December 12, 2005, when public comments are due:

- The City of Grand Rapids Development Center, 1120 Monroe Ave., N.W., Grand Rapids
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, 40 Pearl Street N.W., Ste. 410, Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids Public Library, 111 Library St., N.E., Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids Yankee Clipper Library, 2025 Leonard St. N.E., Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids Township Hall, 1836 East Beltline, N.E., Grand Rapids
- MDOT/Grand Rapids Transportation Service Center, 1420 Front Ave., N.W., Grand Rapids
- MDOT Bureau of Transportation Planning, 425 Ottawa St., Lansing

The document also is available on line at [www.michigan.gov/mdotstudies](http://www.michigan.gov/mdotstudies)

## **NEXT STEPS**

The environmental clearance for this project is scheduled to be completed in December 2005. After reviewing the public hearing transcript and agency comments on the EA, comments will be addressed and any necessary modifications to the Preferred Alternative will be considered in the request for a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Following submittal of this documentation to FHWA, the issuance of a FONSI would clear the way for 2006 construction of the initial phases of the Preferred Alternative.

## **COMMENTS**

Your comments are important and should be addressed to:

**Robert H. Parsons, Public Hearings Officer**  
**Michigan Department of Transportation**  
**P.O. Box 30050**  
**Lansing, MI 48909**  
**Email: [parsonsb@michigan.gov](mailto:parsonsb@michigan.gov)**  
**Fax: (517) 373-9255**

# I-196 / I-96 GRAND RAPIDS IMPROVEMENTS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COMMENT FORM

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has performed an Environmental Assessment and Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation for proposed improvements to I-196, I-96 and M-37/M-44 in the city of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Township. This is your opportunity to comment on the Environmental Assessment (EA), which provides background on the project and presents the Preferred Alternative.

## *GET INVOLVED!*

Your comments are important and will become a matter of public record. All supporting documentation to the Environmental Assessment will be prepared after the close of the comment period on December 12, 2005. All relevant comments received on the EA will be summarized and responded to in the supporting documentation.

\* \* \* PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY \* \* \*

Name	E-mail	
Address		
City	State	Zip

## *TELL US WHAT YOU THINK.*

Please use the space below and additional pages if necessary. Turn your comment form in at the public hearing, or give your comments orally to the court recorder. If you wish, you may mail, fax or e-mail them (see below).

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***Please return this form before you leave or mail or fax it by December 12, 2005 to:***

***Mr. Robert H. Parsons  
Public Hearings Officer  
Michigan Department of Transportation  
P.O. Box 30050  
Lansing, MI 48909  
Fax: 517.373.9255***